1 Interview Summaries

1.1 Focus Group for Utilities: Water and Sewer

Interview Type	Focus Group, Utilities: Water and Sewer
Interview Location	Burton Cross State Office Building, Augusta, Maine
Interview Date	October 29, 2001
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Interviewer	Thomas Burns agismap1@maine.rr.com
Interviewed:	

- Paula Thompson, Water Protection Specialist, Maine Rural Water Association, pthomspon@mainerwa.org
- W. John Barlow, Manager, Paris Utility District, Paris, Maine
- David A. Sweet, Superintendent, Kennebunk, Kennebunkport and Wells Water District, Kennebunk, Maine
- Michael A. Morey, Director of Engineering Services, Augusta Water District, Augusta, Maine, mmorey@augustawater.org.
- Daniel R. Wells, P.E. Superintendent, Winthrop Utilities District, Winthrop, Maine, winutil@ctel.net
- Michael Bolduc, Water Operations Engineer, Portland Water District, Portland, Maine, gjohnson@pwd.org

1.1.1 Overview

In contrast to the Utility Focus Group comprised of Gas, Electric and Telecommunications, the Water and Sewer Utilities are very much Maine-based organizations. The range of the scale of operations was evident by the presence of the Portland Water District (PWD) and the Winthrop Utilities District (WUD). The PWD has a long-standing GIS capability (1991) while the WUD has no digital capabilities at all. While the delivery of fresh, clean water and the effective dispatch of sewer are somewhat different objectives, the use of GIS in relation to those two, different activities have similar environmental considerations; the two objectives also share a common concern about the evaluation of, and the understanding of a networked infrastructure.

1.1.2 Business Functions

Although it is difficult to characterize commonalities among the groups' business functions given the disparate technical capabilities, several broad themes emerged:

- Data Development. Most utilities spend time trying to inventory their systems, assess the degree of automation they do or do not have, and either map or assess what it would take to map their networked infrastructure.

- Data Acquisition. As opposed to original data development, most of the utilities were attempting to acquire and use, basic Maine OGIS datasets. In addition, most of the utilities were, where possible, trying to acquire municipal parcel composites.

- Environmental Assessments of New Development. Most of the utilities need to be concerned about growth either in terms of accommodating new development (sewer) or to protect wellheads or other primary water supplies (water).

- Waster Water Treatment Facility Issues. Some of the utilities had particular interests in the operation of WWTFs such as infiltration issues, upstream development and build-out scenarios.

1.1.3 Data

A summary of desired data needs would include:

- Accurate Political Boundaries and known boundary monumentation
- MeDOT control point data
- Municipal Parcel Composites
- Building Permit Data
- Zoning

1.1.4 Statewide GIS Initiative Needs

The strongest and unanimous desire of any statewide GIS initiative was for the state to:

- Set standards for the development of certain datasets;
- Declare or certify the degree of accuracy for a given dataset;
- Promote metadata.

The group seemed frustrated with the wide array of parcel composites they acquire. They noted that many times, parcel composites at municipal boundaries overlap each other, attribute information was not directly comparable and that different projection posed problems.

1.1.5 Stakeholder Roles

To a degree, each utility felt some sense of shared responsibility for GIS development in the communities they serve. However, the amount of day-to-day interaction or shared technical development with the communities they serve was limited. Some larger utilities, such as the Portland Water District, can be very open to sharing their data and are very interested in promoting the growth of GIS among their municipal counterparts.

1.1.6 Major Benefits and Cost Justification

Most utilities use their GIS to inventory assets and to understand the overall environment in which their systems function. Most initially used the GIS for watershed management or to understand patterns of development. Having the ability to accurately map their actual systems and model the dynamics of their systems has developed more slowly. The perceived benefits stemmed from part of a larger trend, and natural progression of increasing uses of technology to manage the respective utility.

There was little or no discussion about cost justification or of any objections by stakeholders or ratepayers to GIS expenditures. GIS budgets seemed to be modest with no extraordinary initiatives underway that would bring unwanted attention to current GIS programs.